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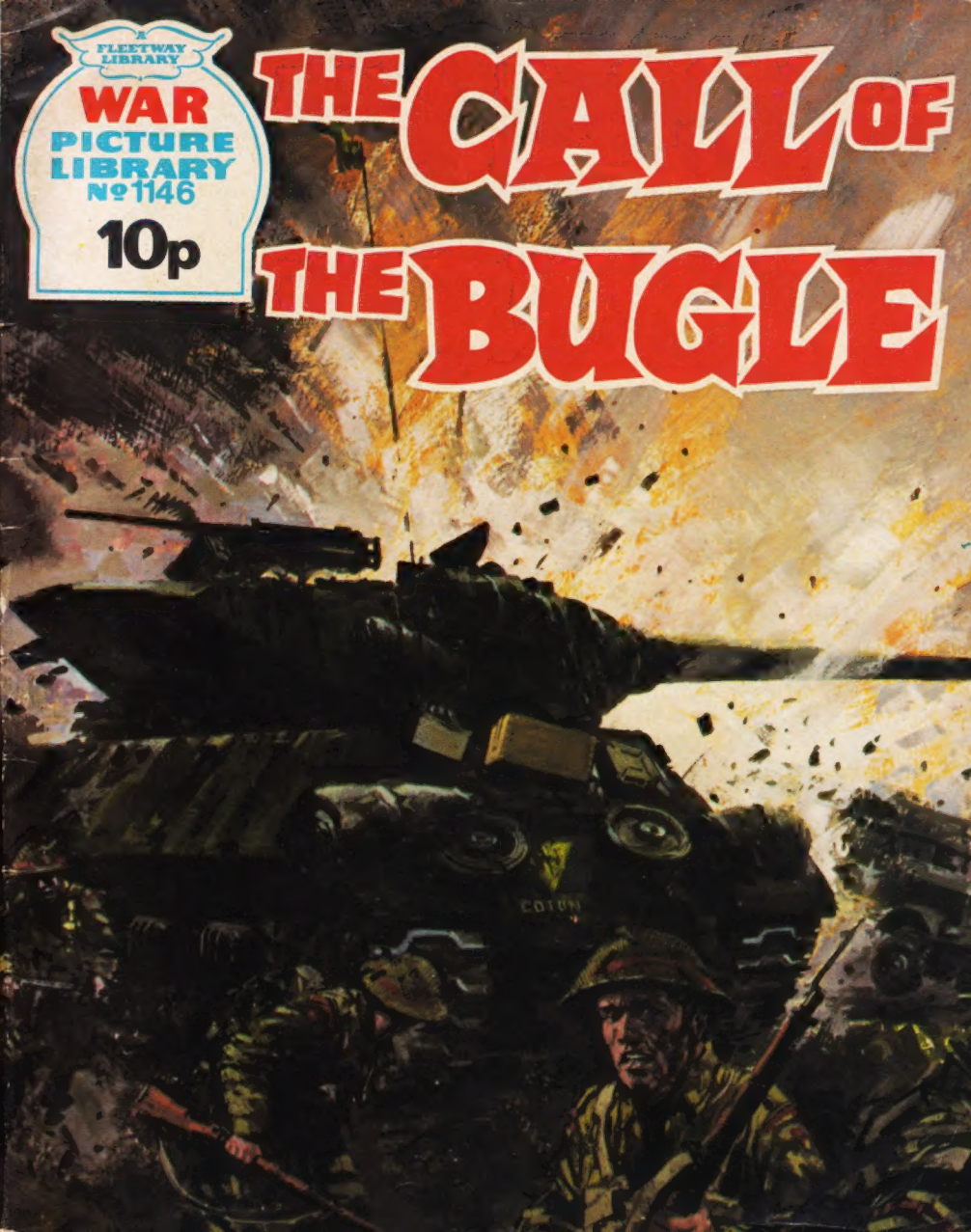

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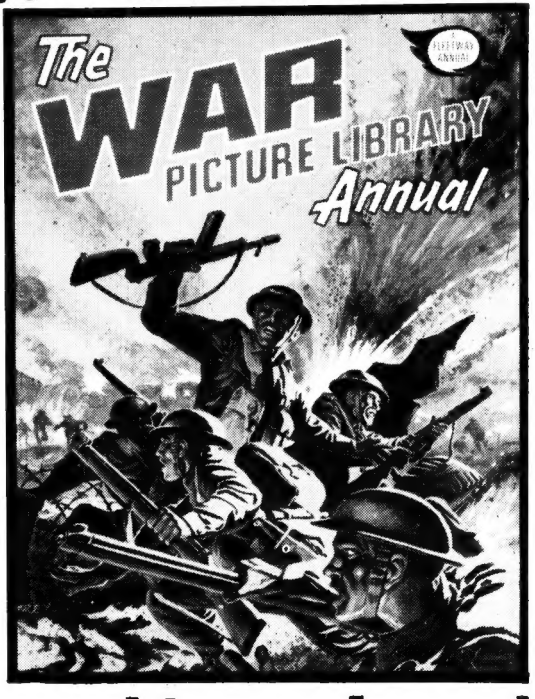

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THE CALL OF THE BUGLE

THE FIRST LIGHT INFANTRY COMPANIES WERE RAISED AROUND 1770. THE MEN WERE HAND-PICKED, CHOSEN FOR THEIR TOUGHNESS, SELF-RELIANCE AND PROWESS WITH THE MUSKET. QUALITIES THAT WERE TO BE NEEDED AGAIN WHEN WAR SWEPT ACROSS EUROPE DURING THE BITTER YEARS OF WORLD WAR TWO...

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Chapter I. CAP OF COURAGE

IT WAS APRIL, 1945, AND THE ALLIED 21ST ARMY GROUP WAS DRIVING HARD TOWARDS THE HEART OF GERMANY. FROM THE WEST BANKS OF THE EMS RIVER AND THE DORTMUND-EMS CANAL, BRITISH GUNS STARTED SHELLING THE GERMAN TOWN OF LINGEN ON THE EASTERN SIDE OF THE WATERWAYS...

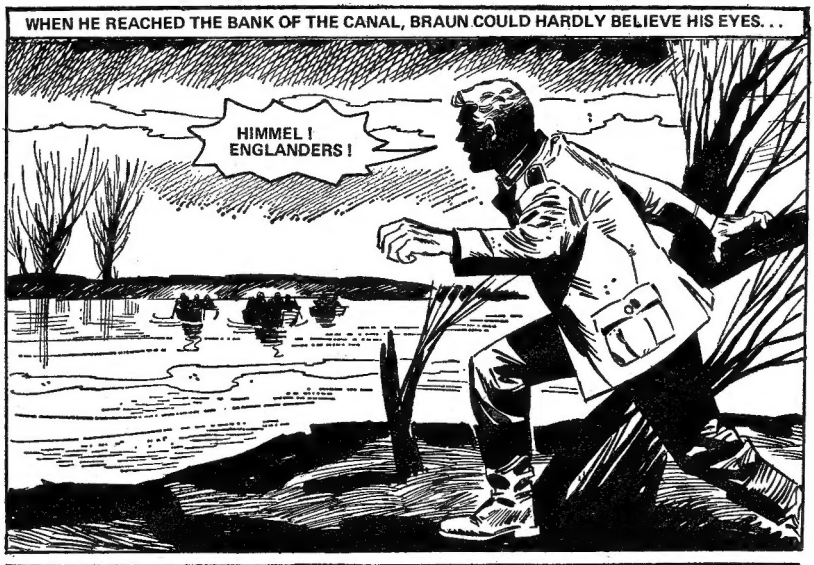
THE GERMANS HAD ALREADY DESTROYED THE BRIDGES OVER THE RIVER AND CANAL AROUND LINGEN. BUT THEY KNEW THAT WOULD ONLY DELAY THE ALLIED ADVANCE — NOT STOP IT...

BUT THE ARTILLERY FIRE WAS INTENDED TO MAKE THE ENEMY THINK THE CROSSINGS WOULD BE NEAR LINGEN. IN FACT, TWO MILES UP-RIVER, THE 2ND BATTALION, KING'S SHROPSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY, WERE CROSSING THE RIVER BY AN OLD WOODEN BRIDGE.
NO NOISE ! TAKE IT EASY !
THEY REACHED THE CANAL BANK WITHOUT OPPOSITION AND FOUND THE BOATS WAITING FOR THEM. CORPORAL BRIAN COOMBES OF 'Z' COMPANY BEGAN TO GET HIS SECTION EMBARKED...
IN YOU GET. AND FOR PETE'S SAKE, KEEP QUIET. YOU HEARD THE ORDER.

WHAT'S UP, CORP ? YOU GOT THE JITTERS ?
THE CORPORAL CHOKED BACK A SAVAGE ANSWER.
PIPE DOWN, MILLER. SAVE YOUR BREATH BECAUSE YOU'RE GOING TO NEED IT WHEN WE HIT THE FAR BANK.
THE JIBE HAD STRUCK HOME. THE BURLY YOUNG N.C.O. KNEW, TOO, THAT HE DESERVED IT...
IT WON'T BE THE SAME THIS TIME. IT WON'T BE THE SAME...

INSIDE A FARMHOUSE ON THE EAST BANK OF THE CANAL, FRANZ BRAUN HAD BEEN DISTURBED FROM HIS SLUMBERS BY THE RUMBLE OF ARTILLERY FIRE...
HANS, CAN YOU HEAR IT ? THEY ARE SHELLING LINGEN.
ACH, GO BACK TO SLEEP ! THEY WON'T DISTURB US HERE.

BUT BRAUN WAS ALREADY PAST SLEEP...
I'M GOING OUT TO GET A BETTER LOOK. IF THEY CROSS NEAR LINGEN THEY COULD DRIVE NORTH.
NOT TILL MORNING, THEY WON'T.


WHEN HE REACHED THE BANK OF THE CANAL, BRAUN COULD HARDLY BELIEVE HIS EYES...
HIMMEL ! ENGLANDERS !

AS HE TURNED TO RUN BACK, SHOUTING A WARNING, RIFLES OPENED UP FROM THE BOATS...
ENGLANDERS ! AAARGH !

BUT THE SHOTS ROUSED BRAUN'S COMRADES. WITHIN SECONDS, THE GERMANS WERE MANNING THEIR GUNS.
TEUFEL ! SINK THEM !
HURRIEDLY, THE LIGHT INFANTRY MEN SOUGHT THE COVER OF THE HIGH BANK WALL...
QUICK ! QUICK ! GET UP TO THE BANK !
THAT FARM'S LIKE A FLIPPIN' FORTRESS !
AARGH !

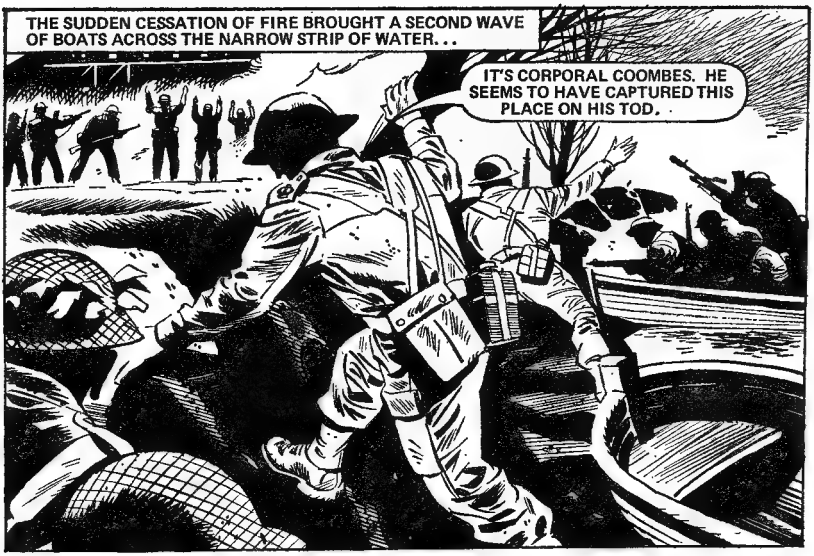
THEY GAINED PROTECTION – BUT IT COULD NOT BE FOR EVER.
FINE LANDING THIS TURNED OUT TO BE ! IF WE CLIMBED UP THERE, THEY'D PICK US OFF ONE BY ONE.
FROM HIS POCKET BRIAN COOMBES PULLED OUT A SIDE-CAP. HE LOOKED AT THE LIGHT INFANTRY BADGE ON IT. . .
WHAT'S THE BIG-NOISE CORPORAL GOIN' TO DO ABOUT IT NOW ? WAIT FOR ORDERS, I'LL BET.
SHUT UP – AND KEEP SHUT UP. I'LL DO THE TALKING.
THIS IS IT, THEN. IT'S NOW – OR I KNOW IT'LL BE NEVER. . .

HE TOOK OFF HIS HELMET AND FORCED THE CAP FIRMLY ON TO HIS HEAD.
RIGHT ! WE'VE GOT TO WINKLE THOSE JERRIES OUT OF THERE !
YOU'RE MAD ! THEY'LL CUT US IN TWO IF WE STICK OUR HEADS UP !

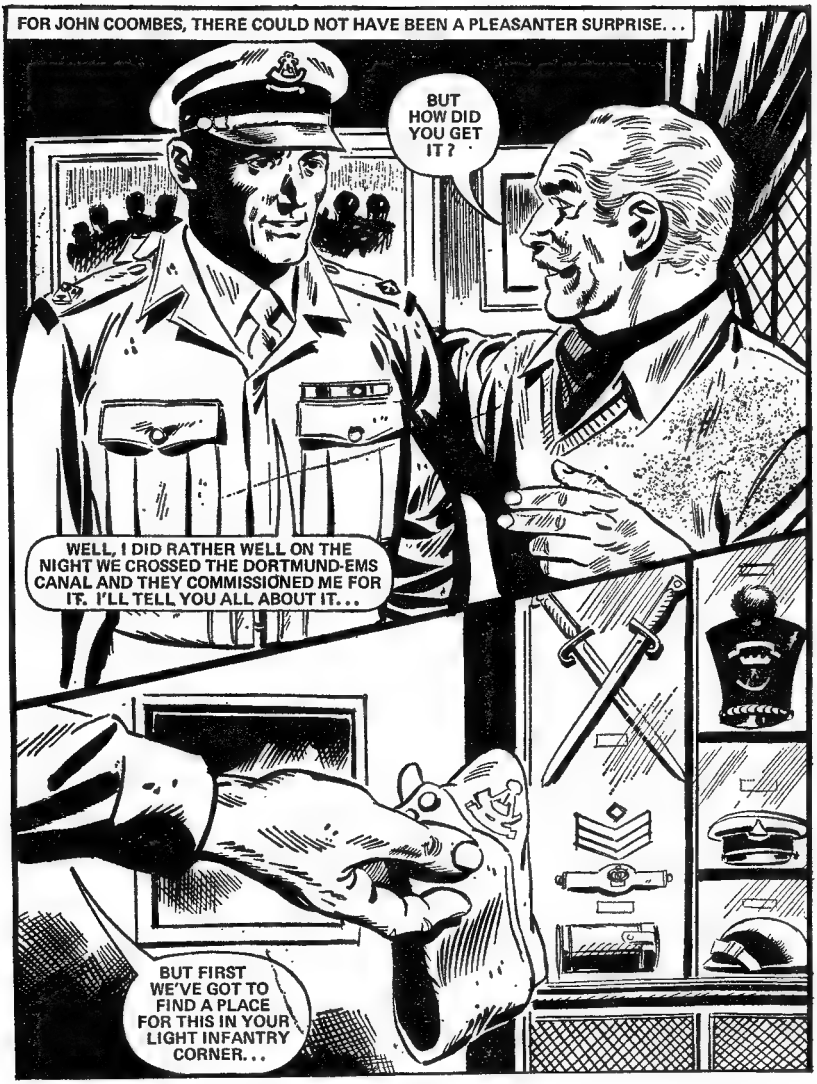
THEY MIGHT HAVE THOUGHT HIM MAD YET THEY OBEYED HIS ORDERS WITHOUT QUESTION.
I'M GOING UP. FOLLOW ME – AND KEEP FIRING FOR ALL YOUR WORTH !

HE REACHED THE TOP OF THE CANAL BANK AND RAN, FIRING THE BREN FROM THE HIP...
AAARGH!

THERE WAS NO STOPPING THEM NOW. LED BY THE CORPORAL, THE INFANTRY WENT IN LIKE A TORNADO...
AIEEE!


THE SUDDEN CESSATION OF FIRE BROUGHT A SECOND WAVE OF BOATS ACROSS THE NARROW STRIP OF WATER...
IT'S CORPORAL COOMBES. HE SEEMS TO HAVE CAPTURED THIS PLACE ON HIS TOD.

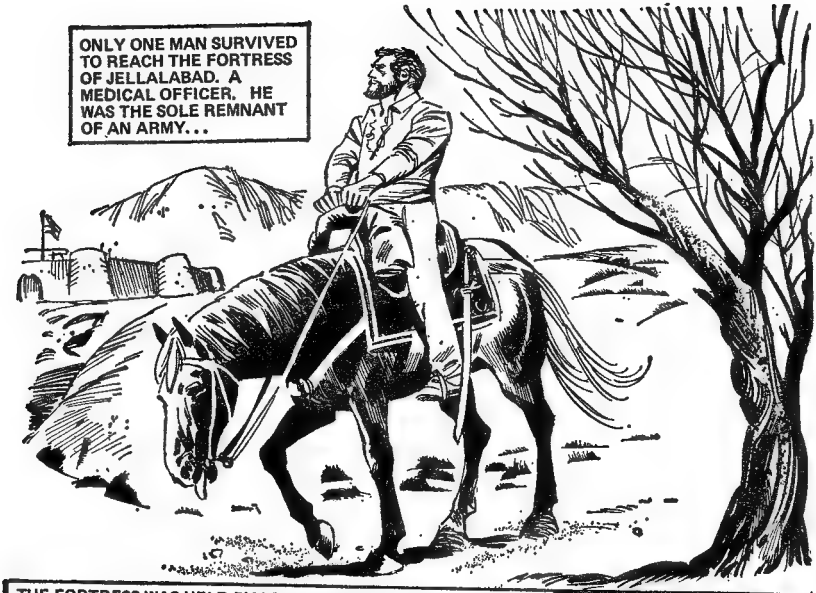
IN JUNE, 1945, BRIAN COOMBES GOT HIS FIRST LEAVE FOR MONTHS AND CAME BACK TO HIS HOME IN SHROPSHIRE AS A 2ND LIEUTENANT...
IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN, LAD. BUT YOU SAID NOTHING ABOUT ANY PROMOTION!
WANTED TO SURPRISE YOU, DAD.

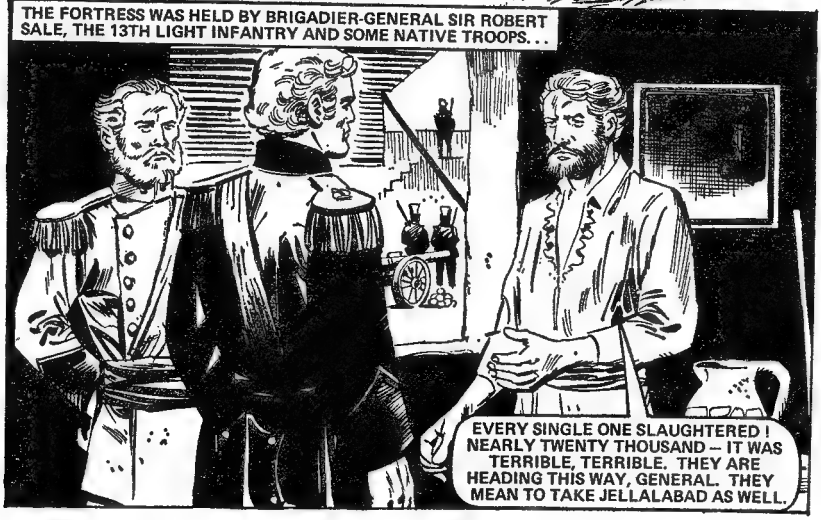

FOR JOHN COOMBES, THERE COULD NOT HAVE BEEN A PLEASANTER SURPRISE...
BUT HOW DID YOU GET IT?
WELL, I DID RATHER WELL ON THE NIGHT WE CROSSED THE DORTMUND-EMS CANAL AND THEY COMMISSIONED ME FOR IT. I'LL TELL YOU ALL ABOUT IT...
BUT FIRST WE'VE GOT TO FIND A PLACE FOR THIS IN YOUR LIGHT INFANTRY CORNER...

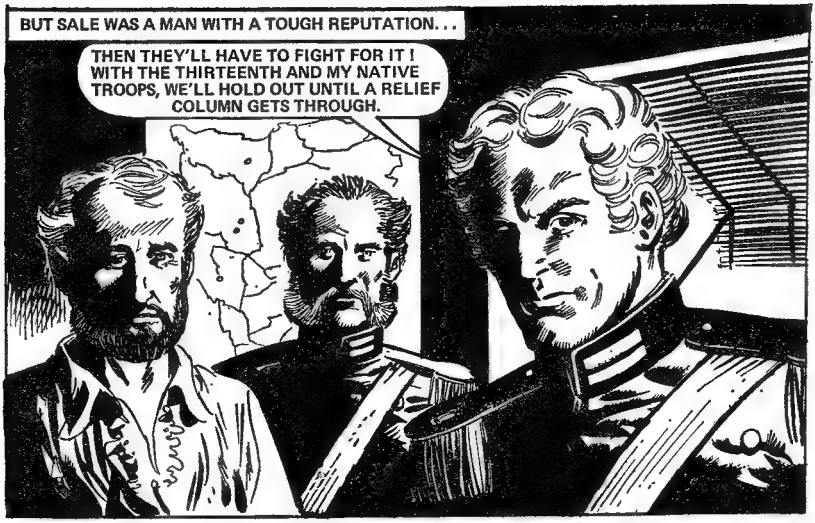
Chapter 2. A LONG TRADITION

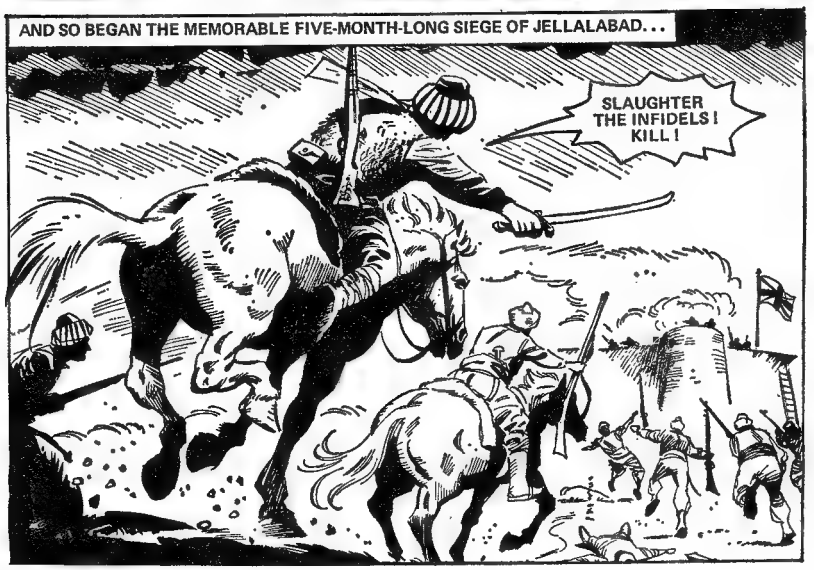
SO THE SIDE-CAP FOUND ITS PLACE IN "THE LIGHT INFANTRY CORNER". IT WAS STILL THERE IN 1974, WHEN LIEUTENANT-COLONEL BRIAN COOMBES (RETIRED) SHOWED IT TO HIS NEPHEW, PAUL...
THIS COLLECTION WAS MADE BY MY FATHER. HE SERVED IN THE LIGHT INFANTRY AND SOMETIMES I BELIEVE HE THOUGHT OF NOTHING ELSE! EVERY PIECE HERE HAS ITS OWN STORY!
THE BOY TURNED EAGERLY TO HIS UNCLE...
MY DAD TOLD ME A LOT ABOUT IT, BUT HE ALWAYS SAID YOU WERE THE EXPERT, UNCLE. PLEASE TELL ME SOME MORE.

FOR BRIAN COOMBES, THE CORNER HAD ALWAYS BEEN LIKE LIVING HISTORY...
TAKE THIS HAT — A SHAKO ITS CALLED. IT BELONGED TO THE OLD THIRTEENTH. THEIR BIG DAY WAS THE SEVENTH OF APRIL, EIGHTEEN FORTY TWO, AT A PLACE CALLED JELLALABAD, ON THE NORTH-WEST FRONTIER OF INDIA.
IN 1841, A BRITISH ARMY HAD OCCUPIED THE AFGHAN CAPITAL OF KABUL, BUT HAD BEEN DRIVEN OUT BY A FORCE OF AFGHAN WARRIORS. THEY TRIED TO RETREAT TO JELLALABAD, BUT WERE TRAPPED IN THE FRONTIER PASSES...
WE'LL NEVER DO IT ! TRY TO SAVE THE WOMEN AND KIDS !


ONLY ONE MAN SURVIVED TO REACH THE FORTRESS OF JELLALABAD. A MEDICAL OFFICER. HE WAS THE SOLE REMNANT OF AN ARMY...


THE FORTRESS WAS HELD BY BRIGADIER-GENERAL SIR ROBERT SALE, THE 13TH LIGHT INFANTRY AND SOME NATIVE TROOPS...
EVERY SINGLE ONE SLAUGHTERED ! NEARLY TWENTY THOUSAND – IT WAS TERRIBLE, TERRIBLE. THEY ARE HEADING THIS WAY, GENERAL. THEY MEAN TO TAKE JELLALABAD AS WELL.


BUT SALE WAS A MAN WITH A TOUGH REPUTATION...
THEN THEY'LL HAVE TO FIGHT FOR IT! WITH THE THIRTEENTH AND MY NATIVE TROOPS, WE'LL HOLD OUT UNTIL A RELIEF COLUMN GETS THROUGH.


AND SO BEGAN THE MEMORABLE FIVE-MONTH-LONG SIEGE OF JELLALABAD...
SLAUGHTER THE INFIDELS! KILL!

AND THE AFGHANS WERE NOT THE ONLY ENEMY. TIME AND AGAIN THE FORTRESS WAS SHAKEN BY MINOR EARTHQUAKES...
'ERE WE GO AGIN ! ONE O' THESE DAYS THE GROUND'LL OPEN UP AN' SWALLOW THE LOT OF US !

TO ADD TO THEIR PROBLEMS, THE RELIEF COLUMN HAD BEEN REPULSED IN THE KHYBER PASS...
BACK ! BACK ! WE'LL BE ANNIHILATED IF WE TRY TO GO ON !

FINALLY, IN APRIL, 1842, SALE HELD A COUNCIL-OF-WAR...
GENTLEMEN, WE CANNOT HOLD OUT MUCH LONGER. I PROPOSE WE MAKE A SORTIE AND TRY TO DISPERSE THE ENEMY LONG ENOUGH FOR GENERAL POLLOCK TO GET THROUGH.
THE COLONEL OF THE 13TH SPOKE UP...
I AGREE, SIR. BUT I AM SHORT OF OFFICERS. WE ARE HAVING TO MAKE SERGEANTS ACT FOR THEM...
VERY WELL, LET YOUR SERGEANTS BE OFFICERS. WE ATTACK ON THE SEVENTH...
AND ON THE MEMORABLE 7TH APRIL 1842, THE 13TH MADE ITS GALLANT SORTIE...
THE INFIDELS ARE WALKING RIGHT INTO OUR GRIP!

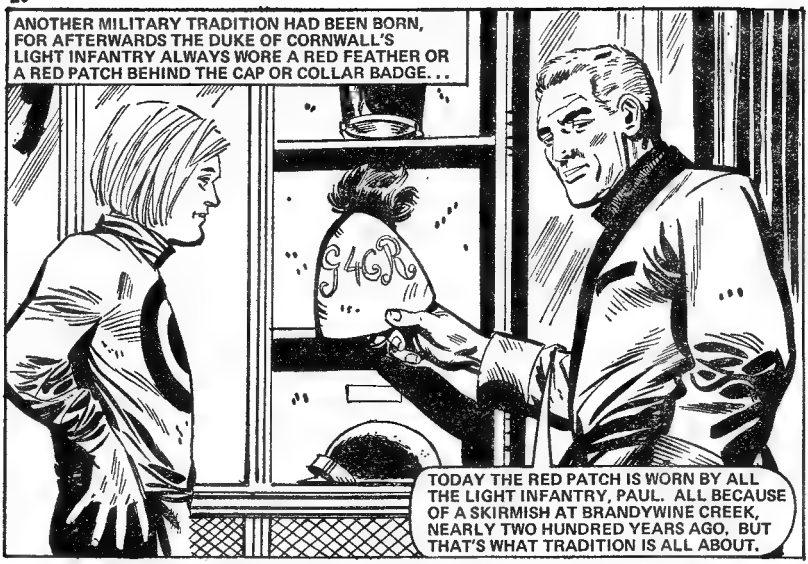
TO DISTINGUISH THEM IN THEIR TEMPORARY RANKS, THE SERGEANTS WORE THEIR SASHES OVER THEIR LEFT SHOULDERS, IN THE MANNER OF OFFICERS...
RIGHT, LADS! C'MON, LET'S SEE THE DEVILS OFF!
THE SORTIE ENDED IN GLORIOUS SUCCESS, ENABLING THE RELIEF COLUMN TO GET THROUGH...
WHEN THEY MARCHED OUT, EVERY GARRISON THEY PASSED THROUGH TURNED OUT TO GREET THEM. THEY WERE NAMED "THE ILLUSTRIOUS GARRISON", A TITLE THEY TREASURED...

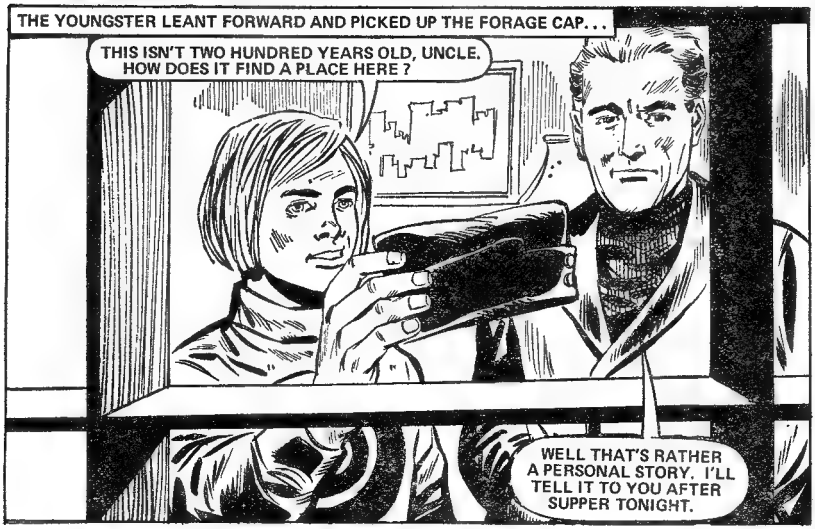
JELLALABAD BECAME MORE THAN A BATTLE HONOUR...
QUEEN VICTORIA GRANTED THEM THE RIGHT TO INCLUDE JELLALABAD IN THEIR BADGE.
JELLALABAD
THAT'S ONE OF THE SASHES WORN BY THE SERGEANTS ON THE SORTIE. BUT WE CAN GO FARTHER BACK THAN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY...
THE OLDEST PIECE IN THE CORNER WAS A LEATHER CAP WITH A RED PLUME IN IT...
G4GR
THIS ONE IS INTERESTING. IT BELONGED TO THE FORTY-SIXTH. IT ONCE HAD A WHITE PLUM OF FEATHERS IN IT. THIS IS THE STORY...

DURING THE AMERICAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE, IN SEPTEMBER, 1777, GENERAL WASHINGTON DETACHED A FORCE TO AMBUSH THE BRITISH NEAR BRANDYWINE CREEK...
GIT WHAT SLEEP YOU CAN TILL WE SIGHT THE BAGGAGE-TRAIN. I'LL HAVE PICKETS OUT, SO WE'LL GIT PLENTY O' DUE WARNING.
BUT A LOYAL CIVILIAN HAD WARNED THE BRITISH, AND THE LIGHT COMPANIES OF THE 42ND, 44TH AND 46TH WERE DETACHED TO DEAL WITH THE SITUATION...
THIS WAY! THEY'RE ALL TUCKED IN ROUND PAOLI TAVERN.

THE AMERICAN SENTRIES WERE STALKED — AND DEALT WITH ONE BY ONE...
UGH!
AND THE WOULD-BE AMBUSHERS WERE AMBUSHED THEMSELVES...
AAARGH!

NEARLY TWO HUNDRED MEN WERE KILLED AND MANY WOUNDED IN THE ACTION. THE AMERICANS VOWED VENGEANCE ON THEIR ATTACKERS...
WORD IS THAT THEY'LL SEEK OUT THE BRITISHERS WHO SLAUGHTERED 'EM LIKE THAT!
THEN WE'LL HAVE TO HELP 'EM, WON'T WE?
SOON THE WHITE-FEATHERED PLUMES IN THE CAPS WERE BEING DYED RED...
IT'LL MAKE US DIFFERENT FROM THE REST O' THE ARMY, SIR. EASIER FOR THE YANKS TO PICK US OUT, IF THEY'RE SPOILING FOR A FIGHT SO MUCH...
A SPLENDID IDEA. SPLENDID!


ANOTHER MILITARY TRADITION HAD BEEN BORN, FOR AFTERWARDS THE DUKE OF CORNWALL'S LIGHT INFANTRY ALWAYS WORE A RED FEATHER OR A RED PATCH BEHIND THE CAP OR COLLAR BADGE...
TODAY THE RED PATCH IS WORN BY ALL THE LIGHT INFANTRY, PAUL. ALL BECAUSE OF A SKIRMISH AT BRANDYWINE CREEK, NEARLY TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO. BUT THAT'S WHAT TRADITION IS ALL ABOUT.


THE YOUNGSTER LEANT FORWARD AND PICKED UP THE FORAGE CAP...
THIS ISN'T TWO HUNDRED YEARS OLD, UNCLE. HOW DOES IT FIND A PLACE HERE ?
WELL THAT'S RATHER A PERSONAL STORY. I'LL TELL IT TO YOU AFTER SUPPER TONIGHT.

Chapter 3. THE FIRST STEP

AND THAT NIGHT AFTER SUPPER...
I'D BETTER BEGIN AT THE BEGINNING. YOU SEE, MY FATHER AND HIS FATHER WERE OLD LIGHT INFANTRY OFFICERS – AND IT WAS MY AMBITION TO FOLLOW THEM. BUT SOMETHING HAPPENED...
IT HAD BEEN BACK IN THE SUMMER OF 1939, WHEN BRIAN COOMBES WAS ONLY SEVENTEEN...
BRIAN! IT'S COME!

THE LETTER CONTAINED THE RESULT OF HIS ENTRANCE EXAMINATION TO THE ROYAL MILITARY COLLEGE AT SANDHURST...
I'VE FAILED ! I WAS SCARED THIS WAS GOING TO HAPPEN. IT WAS A JOLLY STIFF PAPER.
FAILED ?
HIS FATHER WAS BITTERLY DISAPPOINTED...
THAT'S WHAT COMES OF SPENDING MOST OF YOUR TIME PLAYING GAMES ! I'VE WARNED YOU BEFORE TO CONCENTRATE ON YOUR STUDIES.
I'M SORRY. HONEST, I AM. I CAN HAVE ANOTHER SHOT AT IT THOUGH. THIS TIME I'LL REALLY DO SOME SWOTTING !
THAT'S EASIER SAID THAN DONE !

BUT BEFORE HE RETURNED TO SCHOOL AT THE END OF THE SUMMER A DIFFERENT CRISIS HAD ARISEN. ON THE 3RD SEPTEMBER THE PRIME MINISTER MADE AN 'HISTORIC ANNOUNCEMENT...
...BUT NO REPLY WAS RECEIVED FROM THE GERMAN GOVERNMENT, AND I HAVE TO TELL YOU THAT AS FROM ELEVEN O'CLOCK TODAY THIS COUNTRY IS AT WAR WITH GERMANY.

THE OLDER MAN, WHO HAD SERVED THROUGH ONE WORLD WAR, SHOWED NO EXCITEMENT. BUT FOR THE BOY, IT WAS THE BEGINNING OF AN ADVENTURE...
YOU KNOW WHAT THIS MEANS? I CAN'T JUST SIT AROUND AND WAIT UNTIL I GET INTO SANDHURST NOW, DAD.

IT COULD BE OVER BY THE TIME I PASSED OUT. NO, I'VE GOT TO ENLIST IN THE RANKS. YOU'LL LET ME, WON'T YOU, DAD?
ALL RIGHT. I AGREE. BUT ON ONE CONDITION. THAT YOU TRY TO WIN A COMMISSION IN THE FIELD. IT'S DONE ALL THE TIME IN WARTIME, AND WITH YOUR BACKGROUND IT SHOULD NOT BE DIFFICULT.

THE YOUNGSTER DID NOT HAVE TO THINK TWICE...
I'LL DO IT ! IT'LL BE A PIECE OF CAKE. DON'T WORRY, DAD. I WON'T LET YOU DOWN.
AT THE INFANTRY TRAINING CENTRE YOUNG COOMBES THREW HIMSELF WHOLEHEARTEDLY INTO HIS SERVICE LIFE.
ALL RIGHT, LISTEN, YOU BLOKES. I'M TAKING NAMES OF ANYBODY ANY GOOD AT SPORT. COME ON, SPEAK UP.
I AM, SERGEANT. PLAYED FOR THE SCHOOL AT RUGGER, HOCKEY AND CRICKET.

A WEEK LATER HE FOUND OUT WHY THE SERGEANT WANTED THE NAMES...
HE'S GOING OVER FOR ANOTHER TRY! WE'VE GOT A NATURAL HERE. WHAT'S HIS NAME, NICK?
COOMBES, SIR. PRIVATE BRIAN COOMBES. HE'S THE CHAP WHOSE FATHER COMMANDED A K.S.L.I. BATTALION.
SHOULD HAVE A GOOD EDUCATION THEN? WHEN HE PASSES OUT HAVE COOMBES POSTED TO THE CENTRE AS A COMPANY CLERK – AND WING-THREE-QUARTER!
AT THE TRAINING CENTRE, TURNING OUT FIRST-CLASS BALL-PLAYERS WAS ALMOST AS IMPORTANT AS PRODUCING FIRST CLASS FIGHTING MEN...

SO BRIAN NEVER LEFT THE CENTRE. HE WAS STILL THERE IN THE FOLLOWING SUMMER – AND HATING IT...
I'M NO GOOD AS A CLERK, SIR. I WANT TO GET INTO A LIGHT INFANTRY REGIMENT. CAN'T I BE POSTED, SIR ?
RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CRICKET SEASON ? TALK SENSE, COOMBES. TELL YOU WHAT THOUGH, I'LL SEE YOU GET YOUR SECOND STRIPE.

AND STILL, IN 1942, THE YOUNG MAN KEEN TO FIGHT, WAS STILL CLERKING...
SOMETHING'S GOT TO HAPPEN SOON, DAD, OR I'LL GO NUTS ! I SEEM TO SPEND ALL MY TIME EITHER KICKING OR HITTING A BALL ABOUT. AND FILLING UP FORMS. CAN'T YOU DO ANYTHING FOR ME ?

JOHN COOMBES THOUGHT HARD. HE HATED PULLING STRINGS – BUT THIS WAS DIFFERENT.

YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE BEEN A SPORTSMAN, BRIAN. BUT I'VE STILL GOT A PAL OR TWO IN HIGH PLACES...

THANKS, DAD.

THE STRINGS WERE PULLED AND THE TRAINING CENTRE LOST ITS BEST GAMES PLAYER— WHILST THE 2ND BATTALION KING'S SHROPSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY GAINED A BRAND NEW CORPORAL...

HERE HE COMES. OUR NEW CORPORAL. RECKON HE WON'T KNOW ONE END OF A GUN FROM THE OTHER...

PRIVATE STOKES WAS FROM GLASGOW – AND TOOK LIFE AS IT CAME...
GIVE THE LADDIE A CHANCE. LET'S SEE WHAT HE SHAPES UP LIKE, PATSY.
BUT THE IRISHMAN, MILLER, WAS UNIMPRESSED...
SO, YOU'RE THE CHAPS IN MY SECTION EH? WELL, I'M CORPORAL COOMBES, AND I'M CERTAIN WE'LL GET ON FINE TOGETHER.
OH AYE? WHO SAYS SO?
THE DISCIPLINE AT THE TRAINING CENTRE HAD BEEN STRICT. THERE, PRIVATES STOOD TO ATTENTION WHEN ADDRESSING CORPORALS...
DON'T COME THE OLD SOLDIER WITH ME! YOU'LL CALL ME CORPORAL WHEN YOU ADDRESS ME, UNDERSTAND?

W.P. 1146

PATSY MILLER UNDERSTOOD ALL RIGHT, BUT IT MADE NO DIFFERENCE TO HIM. . .
YOU'VE GOT A LOT TO LEARN, BUT I RECKON YOU'LL BE FINDIN' OUT – CORPORAL.

BRIAN COOMBES HAD ALREADY LEARNT ONE THING – THERE WERE MORE WAYS THAN ONE TO GAIN DISCIPLINE. . .
RIGHT ! WE'LL INSPECT YOUR HUT. COME ON, INSIDE !
WE'VE GOT A RIGHT 'UN HERE, PATSY !
JUST NEEDS EDUCATIN' A BIT, JOCK, THAT'S ALL.

SINCE THEY HAD MOVED INTO THE CAMP, THERE HAD BEEN MORE IMPORTANT THINGS TO DO THAN CLEAN THE HUTS...
LOOK AT THIS MESS ! DON'T YOU KNOW YOU'RE IN A LIGHT INFANTRY UNIT, WITH A CERTAIN STANDARD TO MAINTAIN ?
COME OFF IT, CORP !

COME OFF IT NOTHING ! GET CRACKING ON IT. CLEAR THE WHOLE MESS. I'LL BE BACK IN HALF-AN-HOUR AND IT HAD BETTER BE GOOD !

AS BRIAN LEFT PATSY MILLER TOOK ON A MOCKING VOICE...
YOU CHAPS ARE IN THE JOLLY OLD LIGHT INFANTRY. CERTAIN JOLLY OLD STANDARDS TO MAINTAIN, WHAT? HE'LL BE 'AVING US MARCHIN' AT A HUNDRED AN' FORTY TO THE MINUTE NEXT!
PATSY MILLER HAD NEVER SAID A TRUER WORD...
LEF' – RIGHT – LEF' – RIGHT! STEP IT OUT. YOU'RE MARCHING LIKE A LOAD OF OLD WOMEN!

I TOLD YER. THE MAN'S A MANIAC. THINKS IF WE MARCH FAST ENOUGH WE'LL GET TO BERLIN ALL THE BLOOMIN' QUICKER !
BY TRAINING CAMP STANDARDS THE MARCHING WAS ROUGH — TOO ROUGH FOR THE NEW CORPORAL. . .
HALT ! IT'S NO GOOD — NO GOOD AT ALL !
WHAT'S THE POINT, ANYWAY ? WE'RE LORRIED INFANTRY NOW, REMEMBER ? WE'RE CARRIED AROUND IN TRUCKS, NOT ON OUR FLAT FEET !

WE MAY BE TRAINING AS LORRIED INFANTRY BUT WE'RE STILL LIGHT INFANTRY. THAT MEANS WE LIVE AND BREATHE LIKE LIGHT INFANTRYMEN. ACT LIKE THE LIGHT COMPANIES DID IN THE OLD DAYS. USE OUR INITIATIVE – THINK FOR OURSELVES!

EVENTUALLY THEIR TRAINING TOOK THEM TO SCOTLAND IN PREPARATION FOR 'D' DAY. THEY TRAINED LONG AND HARD, WITH FREQUENT NIGHT EXERCISES...

"W" COMPANY WAS THE "ENEMY" ON THE EXERCISE — AND THEY ALREADY HAD THE BRIDGE COVERED...
HERE THEY COME! OPEN FIRE!

THE FLASH OF THE BLANK AMMUNITION AND THE HAMMER OF THE BREN GUN STOPPED THE PLATOON IN ITS TRACKS...
THEY'RE THERE! TAKE COVER!

THE PLATOON COMMANDER RAPPED OUT HIS ORDERS...
CORPORAL COOMBES, STAY HERE WITH YOUR SECTION. THE REST OF US WILL MOVE DOWN-STREAM AND TRY TO FIND A CROSSING TO GET BEHIND THEM.
RIGHT, SIR.
THE MONTHS HAD BEEN GOING BY AND THERE HAD BEEN LITTLE CHANCE OF BRIAN DISTINGUISHING HIMSELF. BUT HE KEPT TRYING...
UPSTREAM, THERE'S A RAVINE NOBODY WOULD THINK COULD BE CROSSED. I'LL BET NO-ONE'S WATCHING IT. WE CAN CROSS IT...

BUT PATSY MILLER HAD SEEN THAT RAVINE, TOO...
GET ACROSS THAT? CORP, WE'D BREAK OUR NECKS. BESIDES, HE ORDERED US TO STAY PUT. I HEARD HIM.
SOMETIMES, ORDERS HAVE TO BE INTERPRETED ACCORDING TO LOCAL CONDITIONS. THAT'S PROPER LIGHT INFANTRY THINKING. AND I'M SAYING WE'LL DO IT THIS WAY. SO GET MOVING!

THE RAVINE HAD ROCKY SIDES AND A COVERING OF THORN BUSHES. IT WAS TOUGH GOING.
THIS IS DAFT, PLAIN DAFT !
THE RIVER WAS NOT DEEP, BUT THE WATER WAS FREEZING COLD.
QUIET ! WE DON'T WANT TO BE HEARD !

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RAVINE WAS EVEN STEEPER, BUT THE YOUNG CORPORAL WAS DETERMINED TO CARRY ON...
HERE, GRAB MY HAND, I'LL PULL YOU UP.
ONCE CLEAR OF THE RAVINE, THE SECTION WORKED ITS WAY SILENTLY TO THE REAR OF THE BRIDGE DEFENDERS. THEN...
CHARGE! LET 'EM HAVE IT!
HOW DID THEY GET THERE?

IN ONE RUSH THEY HAD CAPTURED THE OBJECTIVE...
JUST ONE SECTION, CORPORAL? WELL DONE! I'VE GOT THE CROSSINGS DOWNSTREAM COVERED, BUT I DIDN'T EXPECT ANYONE TO GET ACROSS UP-RIVER. GOOD WORK.
THANK YOU, SIR.

IT WAS A GOOD STEP TOWARDS HIS AMBITION FOR PROMOTION IN THE FIELD...
I TOLD YOU WE COULD DO IT!
DO WHAT? GET FLAMIN' PNEUMONIA, WHEN WE COULD 'AVE SAT ACROSS THERE AND LET THE OTHERS DO THE WORK!

Chapter 4. A TRUE SOLDIER

THE TRAINING OVER, THEY MOVED BACK SOUTH. THEN ON JUNE 6TH, 1944, CAME D-DAY AND THE GREATEST INVASION FLEET IN HISTORY SAILED FROM THE ENGLISH COAST...
AS HE CROUCHED IN THE LANDING CRAFT WITH HIS SECTION, BRIAN COOMBES FELT A KNOT OF FEAR IN HIS STOMACH...
WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH ME ? THIS IS THE DAY I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR ALL THESE YEARS — I SHOULDN'T FEEL SCARED.

THEY HIT THE BEACH AND GOT CLEAR SAFELY, HEADING INLAND WITH THE TANKS. THEN AN ENEMY GUN BATTERY WHICH SHOULD HAVE BEEN DEALT WITH BY THE R.A.F. CAME VERY MUCH INTO ACTION...
AAAARGH!
THE ADVANCE GROUND TO A HALT AGAINST THE WALL OF HEAVY SHELLING...
GET THAT BATTERY! IT'S GOT TO BE SILENCED BEFORE WE CAN MOVE ON.
YES, SIR. WE'LL GET IT!

THEY REACHED THE WIRE PERIMETER AND COULD SEE THE ENEMY EMPLACEMENTS BEYOND IT...
WE'VE GOT TO TRY TO GET THROUGH THE WIRE. COME ON !
BUT THE GERMAN MACHINE GUNS WERE WELL-SIGHTED AND DEADLY FIRE FELL ON THE ADVANCING INFANTRYMEN...
AAARGH !

FORCED BACK INTO COVER THE POSITION WAS BECOMING CRITICAL...
WE'VE HAD IT ! WE'LL NEVER GET IN THERE ! NOT THROUGH THAT WIRE. GOT ANY BRIGHT IDEAS, CORP ?

THE LAST FEW HOURS HAD BEEN THE WORST ONES OF BRIAN COOMBES' LIFE — FOR HE KNEW HE WAS FRIGHTENED.
WHY SHOULD I ? WE JUST DO AS WE'RE TOLD, THAT'S ALL.

THEN ONE OF THE MEN GAVE A SHOUT...
HEY – WATCH IT! HERE COMES A JERRY!
BUT THE SOLDIER WAS NOT GERMAN. THE DESERTER WAS POLISH...
DO NOT SHOOT, PLEASE. I HELP YOU – PLEASE.
HELP US? HOW CAN YOU HELP US?

THE MAN HAD LIVED INSIDE THE BATTERY POSITION FOR WEEKS. HE KNEW IT INSIDE OUT.
I SHOW YOU HOW TO GET IN VERY EASILY. WE GUNNERS MAKE OPENING TO GET IN AND OUT WHEN WE HAVE NO PASSES. COME – I SHOW YOU.
HANG ON A MINUTE – HOW DO I KNOW YOU'RE TELLING THE TRUTH?

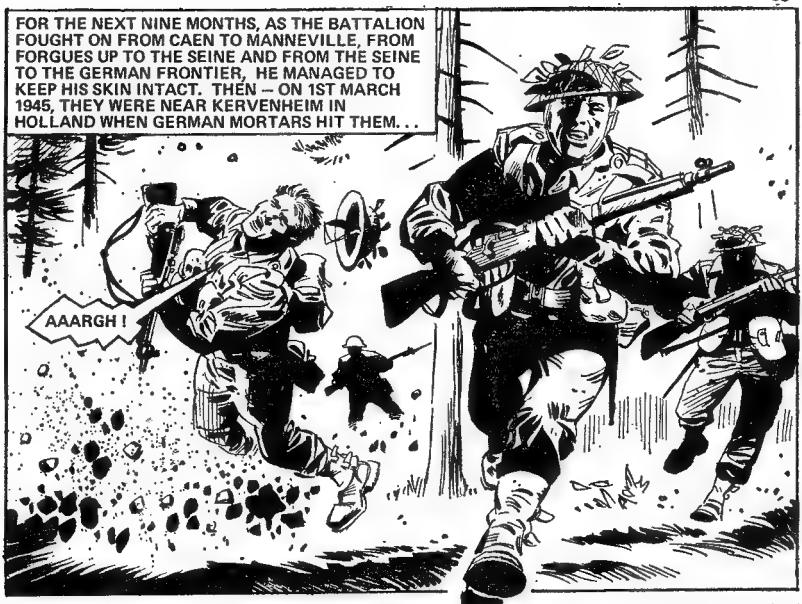
IT COULD BE A CHANCE TO SNATCH AT GLORY. BUT BRIAN COOMBES' HEART WAS POUNDING.
IT IS TRUE! NO-ONE SEE YOU GO IN. I GO WITH YOU, PLEASE – COME –
IF HE'S TELLING THE TRUTH, CORP, IT'S JUST UP YOUR STREET, EH? WE COULD TAKE THE BATTERY ALL ON OUR OWN.

TRAINING EXERCISES WITH BLANK AMMUNITION WERE ONE THING – BUT THIS WAS FOR REAL AND HE DID NOT WANT TO DIE...
THAT WOULD BE STUPID, AND YOU KNOW IT. STOKES, GO AND FIND THE MAJOR. TELL HIM WHAT THIS CHAP SAYS. HE'LL GIVE THE ORDERS THEN.
NOW YOU'RE BEGINNING TO THINK STRAIGHT!

THE MAJOR DID NOT HESITATE. ONCE THROUGH THE WIRE AT THE WEAK POINT THEY SOON HAD THE GERMANS RUNNING FOR THE WOODS...
GET AFTER 'EM! KEEP 'EM MOVING. WHERE'S THE SAPPER SERGEANT?

THE DEMOLITION TEAMS MADE SHORT WORK OF THE BATTERY...
NAE MORE TROUBLE FROM THEM ! BUT THERE'LL BE MORE OF 'EM, YE'LL SEE. PLENTY MORE.

THIS WAS ONLY THE FIRST DAY'S BATTLE. THERE WOULD BE MORE TO FOLLOW — AND BRIAN COOMBES WAS ALREADY CERTAIN OF ONE THING. THEY COULD KEEP THEIR COMMISSIONS — JUST SO LONG AS HE STAYED ALIVE !
DON'T THINK ABOUT IT. C'MON, WE'VE GOT TO BE MOVING AGAIN.


FOR THE NEXT NINE MONTHS, AS THE BATTALION FOUGHT ON FROM CAEN TO MANNEVILLE, FROM FORGUES UP TO THE SEINE AND FROM THE SEINE TO THE GERMAN FRONTIER, HE MANAGED TO KEEP HIS SKIN INTACT. THEN – ON 1ST MARCH 1945, THEY WERE NEAR KERVENHEIM IN HOLLAND WHEN GERMAN MORTARS HIT THEM...
AAARGH!

JOCK STOKES, THE LAD FROM GLASGOW, PICKED HIMSELF UP AFTER BEING BLASTED OFF HIS FEET...
THEY'RE GETTING TOUGH! YOU OKAY, JOCK?
AYE, BUT THE KRAUTS CAME CLOSE THAT TIME!

THE BATTALION PRESSED ON PAST THE BARRAGE...
WATCH OUT FOR THAT FARM, CORPORAL. REPORTS HAVE IT IT'S HELD BY PARATROOPERS.
PARAS, SIR? THAT'S NOT SO FUNNY!

AS THEY WENT INTO COVER, HE TRIED TO HIDE HIS NERVOUSNESS BY SNAPPING AT HIS MEN.
STOKES, KEEP BACK. KEEP IN LINE.
I'LL DO THAT – DON'T WORRY.

THE REPORTS HAD BEEN CORRECT. THE BUILDINGS WERE HELD BY TOUGH GERMAN PARATROOPERS, DETERMINED TO GIVE NO QUARTER...
THAT'S STOPPED THEM!

THE PLATOON WAS PINNED DOWN WITH LITTLE HOPE OF GOING FORWARD...
KEEP YOUR SECTION HERE, CORPORAL, AND KEEP THEM ENGAGED. WE'LL TRY TO WORK ROUND THE SIDES...

BUT ONE MAN WAS TIRED OF WAITING. PRIVATE STOKES WAS ABOUT TO FIGHT HIS OWN WAR...
STOKES! FOR PETE'S SAKE, GET DOWN. WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
TO KICK 'EM IN THE TEETH, THAT'S WHAT!
SINCE BEING FLATTENED BY THE MORTAR BLAST THE LITTLE GLASWEGIAN'S BLOOD WAS UP...
YOU HEARD THE ORDER TO STAY PUT!
LOOK WHO'S TALKIN'! USE YER INITIATIVE YOU USED TO PREACH. SO I'M USIN' MINE NOW! JUST WATCH ME...
HE DASHED FORWARD — FIRING QUICKLY FROM THE HIP...
AAARGH!

THEY SAY THAT FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE. HE DISAPPEARED INTO THE FARM BUILDING, ONLY TO RE-APPEAR AGAIN – WITH TWELVE PRISONERS...
GIT MOVIN' ! GO ON OR I'LL BLAST THE LOT OF YOU !

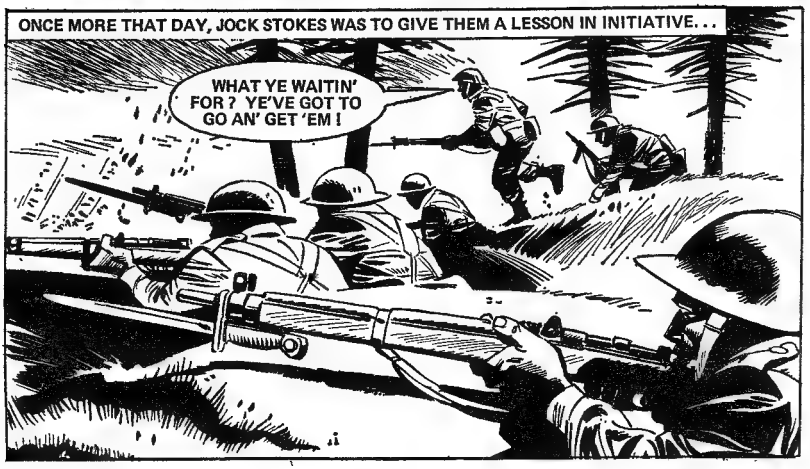
IT HAD BEEN AN HEROIC PIECE OF WORK, BUT JOCK HAD TAKEN A WOUND IN THE NECK...
YOU COULD HAVE BEEN KILLED. YOU'D BETTER REPORT BACK TO THE AID POST FOR TREATMENT.
WHAT ? AND MISS ALL THE FUN ? NOT LIKELY.

THE SCOT WAS STILL WITH THEM AS THEY ADVANCED, COMING UNDER FIRE FROM A HOUSE ON THE LEFT...
GET DOWN !

AGAIN, IT WAS STOKES WHO REFUSED TO TAKE COVER...
YOU 'ORRIBLE RATS !

BUT THIS TIME HE FAILED TO REACH HIS OBJECTIVE IN ONE WILD RUSH...
HE'S BIN CLOBBERED.
HE HAD BEEN HIT, BUT THE BURNING PAIN FROM THE BULLET WOUND ONLY MADE HIM ANGRIER...
I'M NOT DEAD YET..!
THE OTHERS WATCHED IN AMAZEMENT AS HE REACHED THE HOUSE. THEN...
C'MON! HE'S GOT INSIDE! LET'S GIVE HIM A HAND.

FIVE MORE PRISONERS WERE TAKEN BUT JOCK STOKES WAS LOSING BLOOD FAST...
YOU'VE HAD ENOUGH, JOCK, LET ME GET YOU OUT OF IT.
COME ON, CORP. ONCE IT WAS YOU WHO DID ALL THE WILD SHOUTIN' ! I'LL BE OKAY FOR A WHILE YET...


ONCE MORE THAT DAY, JOCK STOKES WAS TO GIVE THEM A LESSON IN INITIATIVE...
WHAT YE WAITIN' FOR ? YE'VE GOT TO GO AN' GET 'EM !

FOLLOW HIM UP ! BACK HIM UP !
WE'RE COMING, JOCK !
JOCK FELL WITH FIVE YARDS TO GO...
UGH !

BUT EVEN THEN, HE KEPT FIRING FROM THE GROUND...
GO ON! SEE 'EM OFF!

IT WAS OVER IN FIVE MINUTES...
TRY TO HANG ON, JOCK. THE STRETCHER BEARERS ARE COMING UP AND THEY'LL GET YOU BACK TO THE MEDICS.
WILL THEY NOW? I'LL BE DOUBTIN' IF THEY'LL MANAGE IT—

THAT DAY, BRIAN COOMBES HAD SEEN SOMETHING HE HAD ONCE DREAMED OF DOING HIMSELF...
I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU DID IT, JOCK.
AW, IT WERE NOTHIN' AT ALL. TAKE ME CAP OUT, WILL YER?
BRIAN PUT HIS HAND INSIDE THE WOUNDED MAN'S BATTLE-DRESS BLOUSE AND PULLED OUT THE SIDE-CAP...
YOU REMEMBER GOING ON ABOUT THAT BUGLE-BADGE AN' US BEING IN THE LIGHT INFANTRY, AN' ALL? WELL, I WAS ONLY REMEMBERIN' WHAT YE SAID. YE CAN KEEP THAT – AN' MIND WHAT YE USED TO SAY YERSELF.

BRIAN COOMBES HAD KEPT THAT CAP – TO REMIND HIM OF A BRAVE MAN – AND HIS OWN DUTY...
JOCK STOKES DIED OF HIS WOUNDS BEFORE HE KNEW HE'D BEEN AWARDED A MEDAL. BUT THEN HE WASN'T LOOKING FOR MEDALS OR GLORY...
YES, HEROES COME IN ALL SHAPES AND SIZES. I'D ALWAYS THOUGHT I WOULD BE THE ONE TO SHOW THEM HOW TO FIGHT. BUT IT WAS LITTLE MEN LIKE JOCK STOKES AND PATSY MILLER WHO TAUGHT ME TO BE A LIGHT INFANTRY-MAN. IT WAS SOMETHING I NEVER FORGOT.
LIGHT INFANTRY

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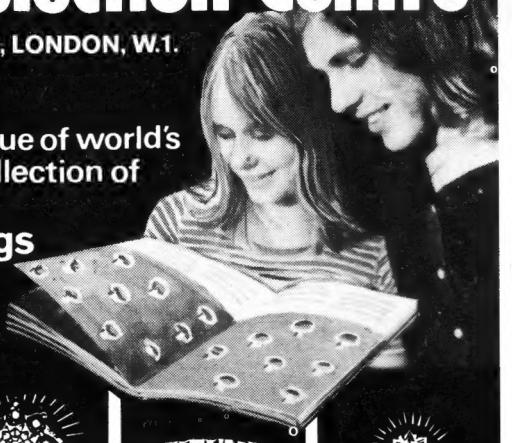

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